

BOOK II, SATIRE VI

SATIRE VI

Many of the personal names in this Satire—the addressee Postumus (l.28), Ursidius (l.38), Censennia (l.136), Tullia (l.306), Maura (l.307), Saufeia (l.320), Medullina (l.322)—are not significant at the present state of our knowledge. Some

may involve topical illusions, now obscure, and some may be metrically equivalent pseudonyms for familiar names.

1. *Saturn*—A Roman God of agriculture and home industry, Saturn is here identified with the Greek deity Cronos, who ruled the universe until overthrown by his son Zeus (Roman, Jupiter). The reign of Cronos was thought to have been a golden age of peace, purity, and plenty. There followed the Silver and Brass Ages of mankind, and last, the Iron Age, which Zeus destroyed by a great flood, excepting one pious couple, Deucalion and Pyrrha.
2. *a sparrow's death*—As Catullus' Lesbia wept at her pet's death. See Catullus, poem 3. This kind of sentimentality was most un-Roman; it is one thing, they felt, to note, another thing to bewail the sparrow's fall.
3. *men came from oaks or dust*—The myths offer several origins for men: oak trees, moist earth, and rocks. There is no doubt that Juvenal takes these origins, along with Saturn and the Flood, less than seriously—less seriously, in fact, than many moderns might.
4. *Astraea; Fury's Snake*—or "Dike," a goddess of justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis (Law). When antediluvian men had run amok, in Ovid's words, "Virgin Astraea, last of the celestials, left bloodsoaked Earth." Her sister "Chastity" (Greek Aidos, Roman Pudicitia) left with her.

Certain major deities, notably Jove (or Jupiter, Greek Zeus), Apollo, Mars (Greek Ares), and Venus (Greek Aphrodite) had small use for chastity. But this Fall fable concerns human beings.

On "Fury's snake," see below, Sat. VII, n. 11.

5. *Leda's dance*—No doubt a lewd "mime" or dance drama. Leda was trodden by Zeus who had assumed the form of a swan, and the same night had more conventional sex with her husband, Sparta's King Tyndareus. She laid two eggs, the one fertilized by Zeus, the other by Tyndareus: from the former were hatched Pollux and Helen; from the latter, Castor and Clytemnestra. Pollux and Castor achieved semi-deity. Helen was Helen of Menelaus and Troy; Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife and slayer (see below, note 66).

6. *Emperor Claudius*—The wife here is Messalina. Her son Britannicus was a popular youth whom Nero poisoned (see n. 12 to Sat. I). Her escapades have been described in similar terms by Pliny the Elder and Suetonius. Her fall and demise are narrated in Tacitus, *Annals* XI, 26–38.
7. *He burnt no torches, never mooned*—Torches (for safety during vigils at the Lady's door and in night wandering) were part of the paraphernalia of Elegiac Love, a pre-courtly form of conventionalized Romantic love. The torches also represent the wounding flame Desire (Cupid, Eros) might cast into a brave and free man's breast in order to conquer and enslave him.
8. *trees for her new vines*—Grape vines were regularly trained on dwarfed elms.
9. *the merchant Jason*—During the winter festival of Saturn, the Saturnalia, Dec. 17–21, temporary booths were set up in the Campus Martius, covering a wall that bore frescoes of Jason and his Argonauts.
10. *Agrippa, Berenice*—Agrippa II of Judea (middle first century A.D.) and his sister, Berenice.
11. *the Sabine girls'*—After the notorious Rape, the Sabine fathers and brothers came to Rome for retribution. The Romans stood armed for defense; but it was the kidnapped women themselves who intervened and prevented war. This was supposed to have happened in the eighth century B.C., when family love had force.
12. *Gracchus matron*—A type of female aristocrat, daughter of Scipio, the conqueror of Hannibal, Cornelia gave birth to Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, political reformers, 133–121 B.C.
13. *Hannibal or Syphax*—Hannibal, the great Carthaginian general, had Italy at his mercy for several years after 216 B.C. His rival, P. Cornelius Scipio, defeated a Numidian ally, Prince Syphax, in 203, and Hannibal himself the next year. Syphax died ambushed in his own camp and Hannibal was obliged—many years later—to take poison when the Romans surrounded the fort where he was hiding.

The shrew boasts the exploits of her father, Scipio; the husband sees himself in Syphax and Hannibal.

14. *Apollo, Artemis, Amphion, Niobe, Latona*—Apollo and his unwed sister Artemis (Roman, Diana) joined in punishing Niobe, who had offended their mother Leto (Roman, Latona) by boasting of her many offspring. Amphion, King of Thebes, Niobe's husband, could not help. The two Gods killed all 12 children; Niobe wept till she turned to stone. Amphion stabbed himself.
15. *Haemus*—Probably an actor.
16. *Archigenes*—A Greek physician.
17. *Floralia's camps*—From April 28 through May 3 each year, Romans worshipped Flora, protectress of tender blossoms, by the often drunken enjoyment of mimes, in which actresses danced naked, by watching gladiators battle wild beasts to death, and by enjoying themselves variously through caprices and unstinting frolic.

These girls may want to join the battle in the arena.
18. *the belt . . . path*—The style of gladiator known as a "Samnite" wore a baldric, ring-armor on the right arm, a greave on the left leg, and carried a shield on his left arm. The "Thracian" gladiator wore greaves on both shins.
19. *Quintilian*—M. Fabius Quintilianus (ca. 35–100 A.D.) practiced law and taught rhetoric under Vespasian, and was tutor to the imperial household of Domitian. His students included Pliny the Younger and perhaps Tacitus. In his guide to teachers of rhetoric (*Institutiones Oratoriae*) Quintilian advocates the return to Cicero's style as a remedy against Seneca's vulgarizing influence upon prose—a suggestion that opposes both technical crudity and linguistic change with the one weapon of reaction. He further outlines what to read, what gestures to use, and what logic to pursue.
20. *Tuscan yarn*—It is Tuscan because it was brought from nearby Etruria, not imported. Spinning and weaving were the prestige skills of Roman women, though of course the latter was respected in high society, the former only among rustics and the poor.
21. *Hannibal*—See above, n. 13. He was at the walls of Rome in 211 B.C., but did not attempt to storm the city.

22. *Sybaris . . . Tarentum*—All these Greek places were beleaguered, but, unlike Rome, all fell. All, like Juvenal's Rome, had first become wealthy, then ripely cultured, then effete. Sybaris was obliterated in 510 B.C. by Croton; Rhodes was reduced to a minor power by Rome in 169 B.C.; Miletus was destroyed by Persia in 494 B.C.; Tarentum was wrecked by Rome in 209 B.C. All these Greek states had, moreover, committed some treachery. The Achaean Sybarites had exiled their fellow-citizens of Troezenian origin. These exiles stirred Croton to revenge. Rhodes had deserted her treaty with Rome in favor of Macedonia, and Rome punished her. Miletus rebelled against Persia and Persia punished her. Tarentum, an ally of Rome since 272, defected to Hannibal in 212 B.C., and Rome, still mourning harsh losses, took vengeance. An episode of this affair had been the ill-handling of the Roman ambassador by some Tarentines, at a festival of Bacchus.
23. *drunken Venus*—A double inebriation, of wine and love. The Goddess of Love, and any woman drunk enough, loses moral with visual clarity.
24. *Bona Dea*—See Sat. II, n. 7.
25. *Maenads*—Ecstatic votaries of any deity.
26. *dead Priam and cold Nestor*—Priam, King of Troy, father of innumerable sons and daughters, lived to attain senility. Nestor, a Greek hero had, at the same time, already seen three generations pass. For both, see the *Iliad*; for Priam only, *Aeneid* II; and for Nestor, *Odyssey* III.
27. *than two Anticatos*—The *Anticatones* were two pamphlets written by Julius Caesar in answer to Cicero's *Cato*, a eulogy of the leader of the opposition to Caesar in the Civil War of 49–45 B.C. Probably the two works were soon issued as one volume. It must be remembered that ordinarily Roman books were in the form of scrolls, and that a single scroll containing more than one single work would be rather fat. The *Anticatones* volume of Caesar, then, was twice as big as Cicero's *Cato*, which it was meant to refute. This disproportion suggests weakness. Is Caesar (and the lutist) man or mouse?
28. *Numa's pots*—On Numa, see Sat. III, n. 1. King Numa's piety dignified sacrificial vessels of even the cheapest earthenware.

29. *Clodius*—The demagogue Clodius, on the contrary, had managed to witness the rites of Bona Dea (see Sat. II, n. 7) by entering in feminine garb. The sacrilege took place in 62 B.C., creating a scandal in which Cicero took part. Clodius repaid Cicero in 58, by passing a law which forced him into exile for a year. The rites took place in Julius Caesar's house. Caesar promptly divorced his wife.
30. *matters . . . the tunic pool*—Perhaps another reference to two different styles of arms and armor used by gladiators. But the passage is not clear. The *retarius*, or net-and-trident men, wore no armor, but only a tunic (see Sat. II, n. 12) and would be a "naked" fighter. The Latin of this line may mean simply "they don't mix in a dirty tunic with the nets," or even "the net-men don't mingle with others whose uniforms are dirty."
31. *mask of Thais*—See Sat. III, n. 9. Masks were regularly worn in Hellenistic comedy and its Roman revival; the mask identified the "type" of a character: Greedy Pimp, Strict Father, Soft Father, Clever Slave, Stupid Slave, etc.
32. *Hedymeles*—Some Greek professional. His name might be rendered "Sweetsinger."
33. *the Lamiae*—A family name of the distinguished Aelian clan; so it may stand for all nobles. But *lamiae* were also vampires, with powers of sorcery.
34. *Janus and cold Vesta*—Prayers usually began with Janus and ended with Vesta. Janus was the power inherent in entrances and exits, the force that begins and ends. Vesta was fire itself in its cozy aspect, the power of warm home life. The noble witch ought not to pray for such trivial boons at all. But we see her sacrificing with head duly veiled (l. 389) in order to avoid distractions and unseemly sights. And here Juvenal questions the Gods themselves.
35. *oak-leaf crown*—We must assume that Pollio is a professional performer and the lady's teacher. Oak-leaf crowns were used to wreath the musical and literary winners at Domitian's Capitoline Competition, instituted in 86 A.D. The more natural association with oak leaves, however, is the Civic Crown, awarded for saving a citizen's life in combat.
36. *in Thrace or China*—The Roman colony of Thrace consisted approximately of modern Bulgaria and European Turkey. A

savage place, the interior was little known, even in Juvenal's time. China, with whom the Romans carried on indirect trade, was known only by hearsay. Both, then, were mysterious lands. Thrace, though, was close by, and China incalculably far away.

37. *the threat of all new comets*—Comets were supposed to warn of disaster. The observation of omens, though, was the responsibility of the commanding general.
38. *dying Dido's suicide*—See Vergil's *Aeneid* IV. Dido, Queen of Carthage, had vowed fidelity to her dead husband, and broken the vow with the Trojan hero Aeneas. When Aeneas left her, she committed suicide. The point is that regardless of the right or wrong of it, the tale is only a tale, and Dido does not need excuses. What is more, this is no story to worry one's husband with at dinner.
39. *Vergil's . . . Homer's line*—More intellectualistic hokum: Matching masterpieces. The game goes on still. But *cf.* Sat. XI, ll.179–181.
40. *the stir/ to do an eclipse in*—It was thought that an eclipse of the moon was witches' work. The remedy was to interrupt the spell by breaking the silence of night by beating cymbals and blowing horns.
41. *Silvanus*—Violation of sexual taboo. Only men worshipped Silvanus.
42. *what Indians sell us*—Precious, distant imports: spices and scents.
43. *Isis' dark shrine*—A popular rendezvous. For Isis, see below, n. 47.
44. *War's priestesses*—Worshipping Bellona (see Sat. IV, n. 13). Properly, this worship belonged to men.
45. *Cybele's rites, etc.*—The cult of Cybele, like that of the "Capadocian Bellona," came from Asia Minor to Rome in 204 B.C. The Goddess was brought in the hope she would help drive Hannibal out. The priesthood, whose members castrated themselves at their ordination, was Asiatic, Romans being excluded by law. The ceremonies featured self and mutual mutilation performed to music. See Catullus, poem 63, for some legendry of this religion.

46. *Io*—In order to protect her from Juno's jealousy, Jove turned Io into a cow. Juno was not fooled, and persecuted the girl. Eventually Io fled to Egypt and there at last regained human form. The classical world identified Io with the native Egyptian Goddess Isis, because she was pictured as a lady with horns.
47. *Anubis, Osiris, Isis*—Anubis was the dog-headed servant of Isis and Osiris (or Serapis) her husband. The cult of Isis was the Alexandrian version of the contemporary Egyptian faith, and though influenced by the Greek mysteries, it retained the native ritual. Isis herself was a benevolent mother-Goddess, in whom Greeks, then Romans, recognized qualities of Aphrodite, Demeter, Io, and Hera; in Serapis they saw characteristics of Zeus, Dionysus, Pluto, and Helios.

Special features of the cult were rites of purification, the maintenance of a fully professional hierarchy, and the promise of eternal life, all three of which were lacking in Roman religion. There was a tendency toward the absorption of all deities into Isis, a trend already evident in Stoicism and elsewhere. The tale of the death and resurrection of Serapis was annually celebrated in a sacred drama, and those who attended hoped they would be rewarded by life after death. Elaborate and splendid ceremonies were enacted daily by expert priests in Egyptian linen and tonsure. Ordeals, payments, ethical correctness, and esoteric wisdom made the devotee acceptable to Serapis, who passed judgment on souls.

After two hundred years of social inacceptability and occasional suppression, the Isis-Serapis cult was securely established in Rome by Juvenal's *bête-noire* Domitian (ruled 81–96 A.D.). Suetonius says that during the revolution of 69 A.D. Domitian had escaped from Rome disguised as a priest of Isis and aided by actual priests of the sect.

48. *basket and hay*—The usual explanation is that the baskets contained the Sabbath dinner which was packed in hay as an insulator. A second explanation suggests that the hay was used for bedding. A third approach is to assume the hay was for sale and was hauled in a big basket.
49. *Examining . . . priest*—The Romans had their own tradition of divination by examination of the viscera of sacrificial victims.

Their art was derived from Etruscan usage, and its legitimate performers (haruspices) were well respected. What need, then, of Armenians or other remote aliens, unless for malpractice and black magic?

50. *Chaldeans*—Astrologers. The national name of the founders of astrology became the common name for all its practitioners.

The Temple of Zeus Ammon in North Africa was a respected oracular shrine, and had nothing in particular to do with astrology. But anyone might say something was “as sure as if Ammon had told it.” See Lucan, *Pharsalia* IX, 511–86.

Astrology was widely practiced in the Greco-Roman world, where it was respected as a science, suspected as a weapon.

Lines 569–70: “Saturn” and “Venus” are, here, the planets. Astral worship identified them with the Gods, but not everyone believed that.

51. *Delphic oracles*—This most trusted and longest honored of all oracles in the Greek world had, before Juvenal’s time, passed into dilapidation. It had a modest revival beginning about 100 A.D., however, and dragged existence on into the 4th century. Responses were inspired by Apollo and were made manifest through the voice of a priestess, or more simply by the falling of a white or black (positive or negative) pebble from a bowl.

52. *Otho’s worst enemy*—Otho was encouraged by an astrologer to usurp the imperial power and kill Galba who was then ruling (69 A.D.). See Tacitus, *Histories* I, 21–42. (See Sat. II, n. 10.)

53. *Tanaquil*—Livy says this ambitious woman was “expert in celestial prodigies.” When an eagle removed, then replaced, the cap which her husband, Tarquinius Priscus, wore, she foretold his future greatness. An immigrant from Etruria, he became the fifth king of Rome. Soon, through her power, Tanaquil discovered potential greatness in Servius Tullius, a slave boy. She and Tarquinius freed and raised Servius as their own, and married their daughter to him.

After ruling 38 years, Tarquinius was assassinated by the sons of King Ancus, who hoped to restore their dynasty. Concealing the king’s death from the public, old Tanaquil quietly arranged for the succession of her son-in-law to the throne of her husband.

54. *clutched . . . amber ball*—Ladies of Fashion. Of the Roman amber-craze, Pliny the Elder comments that amber is the one costly thing from which we get no benefit but the consciousness of enjoying a luxury: Martial speaks of the scent of amber ground or merely held in the hand, and says that an embedded ant adds to the value of it.
55. *Petosiris*—An Egyptian astrologer. Manuals of astrology published under his name were available under the Flavian dynasty (69–96 A.D.).
56. *Circus turns . . . the Circus and Rampart . . . the dolphin or the pillar*—The circus, or race course, was an oval track about 1,100 feet long and 350 feet wide, divided by a narrow platform about 900 feet long which was decorated with figures of dolphins on pillars and bore additional tall pillars to mark the turns. The Rampart was an old defensive embankment on the east side of Rome, a favorite strolling place.
57. *purifies what lightning strikes*—An *haruspex*—that is, an official augural priest of the Roman State cult—could be induced to give this great lady a private reading. It was necessary to bury anything struck by lightning and to fence in the grave, with appropriate prayers.
58. *bastard sons . . . found . . . priest supply . . . Scauri*—Left to die, the babies were picked up and sneaked into noble families (such as the Aemilii Scauri) and eventually occupied high priest-hoods (such as that of Mars) which were the special preserve of the high-born.
59. *Nero's uncle . . . draught*—Nero's uncle (and in many ways, his model) was Gaius Caligula, Emperor, 37–41 A.D. He is supposed to have gone mad as a result of a love-potion made from the caul of a colt (see n. 62), administered by his wife Caesonia.
60. *Juno made Jove mad*—As usual, Roman Juno and Jove equated with Hera and Zeus. The chief heavenly family is compared to the imperial, the world to the world state.
61. *Agrippina's toadstool*—See Satire V, n. 18.
62. *a bloody war, colt*—Caligula's madness, induced by the colt-caul philtre (see above n. 59) manifested itself in the murder of

many nobles, the "fathers" of Roman society. Compared with this, the poisoning of Claudius was a work of mercy, its immediate result merely the passing of an ailing man. Is it needless for Juvenal to add that the sequel to Claudius' death was Nero's reign (Sat. V, n. 18) characterized by persecutions and purges of high society?

63. *Sophoclean tones . . . Rutulian skies*—Sophocles is taken as the model of tragedy: contents bizarre and dreadful. "Rutulian" equals "basic Italian," referring to the rough natives whom Turnus led against Aeneas' Trojan intruders. Juvenal is saying: I wish it were true that tales suited to Greek tragedy were unknown in our uncontaminated land, but the contrary is true. He also means: I am showing that satire suffices to tell what tragedy once told.
64. *Medea, Procne*—Medea was a Colchian sorceress who murdered her children because her husband, Jason, left her. She is the subject of tragedies by Euripides and Seneca. Procne was married to Tereus. They had a son, Itys. Tereus raped Procne's sister, Philomela, and cut out her tongue so she wouldn't tattle. But she wove the story into a tapestry. Procne killed Itys, cooked, and fed him to Tereus. To prevent counter-vengeance, the Gods turned Tereus into a hawk, Procne into a swallow, and Philomela into a nightingale (the species are variously assigned). See Ovid, *Meta.* VI. The tale is alluded to in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (see below, n. 66).
65. *Alcestis*—Admetus was destined to a short life, but Apollo got the Fates drunk and secured from them the concession of many years to Admetus, provided someone died in his place. Admetus' wife Alcestis, after his father and mother had refused, offered herself, and so died. Luckily, Hercules intercepted the demon who was to take her to Hades, beat him up, and returned the resuscitated Alcestis to Admetus. This is the subject of a drama by Euripides.
66. *Clytemnestra, Agamemnon*—Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis to secure winds favorable to the fleet sailing for Troy. After the ten-year siege, he returned to Argos. His wife Clytemnestra killed him, as Juvenal says, unsubtly, with an axe.

67. *Mithridates*—Mithridates of Pontus, King 120–63 B.C., engaged in bitter war with Rome throughout the last half of his reign. He had made himself immune to poison by taking many kinds, graduated from minute to massive doses; so that when, at the age of 69, he had been defeated by Roman power, deposed, and finally ruined through Roman influence, he had to commit suicide with a sword. See Housman's poem "Terence, this is Stupid Stuff" in *A Shropshire Lad*.